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Interview with
EARNEST L. ELLIS
June 30, 1981

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas
Interviewer: Dr. Floyd Jenkins
Terms of Use: *F. Jenkins*
Approved: *E. L. Ellis*
(Signature)
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Business Oral History Collection

Ernest L. Ellis

Interviewer: Dr. Floyd Jenkins

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Date: June 30, 1981

Dr. Jenkins: This is Floyd Jenkins recording for the Business Archives Project, North Texas State University, Denton, Texas. Today is June 30, 1981. I am talking to Mr. Ernest L. Ellis at his home at the Crestview Retirement Hotel on Churchill Way in Dallas, Texas. Mr. Ellis owned and worked for many years in what is now Lander's Mercantile in New Hope, but before that it was Frank Ellis Dealer in Everything. Mr. Ellis' father, Frank, helped found that store. I believe he bought it from a fellow named T. P. Tinsley.

Dr. Jenkins: Mr. Ellis, let's get started by getting you to go back and tell us about your family, what you know about your grandparents and your parents, the kind of life they led, and lead up to when and where you were born. Tell us about your grandparents and your parents.

Mr. Ellis: My father came to Texas when his parents stopped in Louisiana, he came on to Texas and stopped at Mr. Jim

Lyons', a farmer and big land owner near New Hope. And he worked for Mr. Lyons on the farm for 50¢ a month and his room and board. I don't know exactly how long he did that. He later married Sarah Elizabeth Jōnes. And after they married he bought this little store, which consisted of a saddle and a few canned goods. He later built it to be a general store selling lots of drygoods, shoes, millinery, ladies hats. The ladies made the hats themselves. Groceries. They had a complete drugstore with a pharmacy. And a hardware. Sold coffins, buggies and everything in the implement line.

Jenkins: Give us some dates now. Your father bought that store from Mr. T. P. Tinsley. About when did he buy it?

Ellis: 1889.

Jenkins: And was that New Hope at that time?

Ellis: That was New Hope at that time. It is now Sunnyvale near Mesquite, yes. That's right.

Jenkins: When did you start to work for the store?

Ellis: Well, I finished high school in Mesquite.

Jenkins: Let's go back and get something about your childhood. Tell us when and where you were born.

Ellis: I was born in New Hope.

Jenkins: Okay.

Ellis: And we remodeled that home out there after I had got

pretty grown.

Jenkins: What is your birthday?

Ellis: I was born in New Hope in 1897, January 31st. And I was just a little chap running around there. I went to New Hope grade school, but I had to go to Mesquite to go to high school.

Jenkins: Tell us a little bit about going to school in New Hope. What was the school like?

Ellis: It was just a two-teacher school that taught up to the eighth grade. There was a lot of learning in those little schools in those days.

Jenkins: What kind of heating did you have in the school?

Ellis: Just a great big old coal burning stove.

Jenkins: What kind of light?

Ellis: Window light.

Jenkins: That's it. That is what I was after. Didn't have any electric lights.

Ellis: There were lamps at night if they had any entertainment or anything like that.

Jenkins: Coal oil lamps?

Ellis: Coal oil lamps.

Jenkins: I see. What about the blackboards? Did you have blackboards?

Ellis: Oh, yes. Blackboards and erasers. We had to beat them

out to clean them up.

Jenkins: Now, you lived right there in New Hope, did you?

Ellis: Yes, right behind the store. Our home was behind the store.

Jenkins: Did ya'll do any farming?

Ellis: No.

Jenkins: You never did do farm work, then?

Ellis: No. I bought some farms, but I never did farm.

Jenkins: Well, as you grew up there in New Hope, what kinds of work did you do as a kid? Did you work in the store?

Ellis: Yes. That is the only job I ever had.

Jenkins: You kind of grew up in the store, then.

Ellis: Yes.

Jenkins: What is your earliest recollections of doing things in the store?

Ellis: Getting ready for Saturday, Sacking up all of the potatoes. A 16 pound bag is a peck of potatoes. And sugar came in barrels. We sacked up some sugar in 25¢ and 50¢ and \$1.00 sacks. And all that kind of stuff we did at night before the next day.

Jenkins: How was the stuff delivered to the store?

Ellis: Well, some of it was shipped to Mesquite, and we hauled it in wagons to New Hope. And some of it we hauled from Dallas. There wasn't any delivery from Dallas in those

days.

Jenkins: Did you go to Dallas in horse and wagon?

Ellis: Yes. We bought shoes at first from Johnson and Rand out of St. Louis, I believe, was the way it was. They shipped them by train to Mesquite. We had to haul a lot of freight from Mesquite.

Jenkins: How long did it take you to go to Mesquite and back to get a load?

Ellis: Oh, it was just three and a half miles in a wagon. You can imagine how long that would take.

Jenkins: How far was Dallas?

Ellis: We considered it in those days 15 miles to the courthouse. It is only about 10 or 11 miles to the fair grounds, something like that.

Jenkins: How long did it take you to go to Dallas and back to get a load for the store?

Ellis: About a day and a half or two days.

Jenkins: Where would you stay over?

Ellis: I wasn't big enough to do that.

Jenkins: Oh, I see.

Ellis: My father had a drayage man.

Jenkins: Did the time come when you went to Dallas?

Ellis: Yes, As we grew and as time changed, We will get to that later.

Jenkins: All right. So you went to school at New Hope through the

8th grade.

Ellis: Yes.

Jenkins: Then you went down to Mesquite.

Ellis: To high school, And finished high school in 1914.

Jenkins: Tell us a little bit about the school in Mesquite while you were there.

Ellis: Well, we used to drive a horse with a buggy to school. Sometimes ride a bicycle. There were no buses in those days. The best way we could get. Some of them just caught rides and went to school.

Jenkins: You didn't have to walk, though. You had a horse, I suppose.

Ellis: Well, one old boy he had to walk, but he always caught a ride.

Jenkins: You had a horse?

Ellis: Oh, yes.

Jenkins: How many grades did they have in high school then?

Ellis: Four.

Jenkins: So you went through what grade?

Ellis: I don't remember. I graduated. I think it was the 10th or the 11th grade.

Jenkins: What were some of the things that you did while you were in high school? Did you get involved in sports or anything at all?

Ellis: No. There wasn't much sports. A little football at recess.

After school we never had any games like that back in those days.

Jenkins: No football between schools? Did Mesquite play other schools in football?

Ellis: Oh, not in those days, I don't think. Not in those days. After school I went to work for my father the next day. And the next year I went to A & M. I just went there one year. He wasn't able to send the two boys to college. John went to Texas University. I think he had two years before I went to A & M. John finished his schooling. I never did go but one year at A & M. Then the war came along.

Jenkins: Did you go into the war?

Ellis: Yes, both of us.

Jenkins: Tell us about that.

Ellis: I didn't see any fighting. And I went first. But my brother saw most of the action, as much action as anybody. He was among the first to be gassed.

Jenkins: Where did you spend your time? Where did you go?

Ellis: I went mostly to England. I stayed in England most of the war.

Jenkins: What were you doing?

Ellis: Driving an ambulance in England.

Jenkins: When did you get out?

Ellis: Oh, I think I got back in June of 1919. The war was over in November of 1918.

Jenkins: And did you go back to the store?

Ellis: Yes.

Jenkins: Okay, tell us something about the community of New Hope and how it was changing during the time that you knew it.

Ellis: When I came back my father was pretty well fixed. And the next year, 1920, I guess more merchants went broke than they did during the depression, according to Dunn and Bradstreet. He didn't go broke, but he got awfully bent. He was broke, but he stayed in business. The following year after that cotton went to 42 1/2¢ a pound. It started down, and we had a lot of it. Papa was the cotton buyer there. He bought cotton that the farmers ginned there. And he bought nearly all of the cotton that people owed him. We sold from fall to fall. You only had one payday a year. When we did our biggest business, probably we didn't take in a dollar that day, lots of days. It was all on credit. And you would either make a lot of money or lose a lot. It went like that. And we sat down and talked it over, and Papa said that he would like for me to stay in the store. John had his education for a journalist, and he went out and got a job

on a newspaper and retired as the editor of the Fort Worth Star Telegram. It is the biggest job on a paper. I think he lived about 10 or 11 years after he retired.

Jenkins: Do you know about when he died?

Ellis: Let's see. I retired in '62, I guess it was. My wife died in '67, and I think he had been retired a few years before that. I just don't remember.

Jenkins: In the 60's.

Ellis: He was in Fort Worth. I was busy in New Hope. I never kept track of those things.

Jenkins: Do you know when he was born?

Ellis: He was two and a half years older than I was. And then I had a sister, Winnie, who taught school in New Hope for a number of years; 30, I think, something like that.

Jenkins: Tell us what New Hope was like. How big a town, what kinds of business activity was going on.

Ellis: Well, New Hope at one time had a Baptist Church, a Presbyterian Church and a Christian Church. And then they had a Methodist Church down at the cemetery; Pleasant Ridge Cemetery it was known as. And it had two blacksmith shops, a gin and a New Hope News weekly newspaper. And then there were two general mercantile stores; one pretty well a general store, and one not

quite as big as the drugstore on the corner. And there was a little restaurant, a little barbershop. A pretty nice little thriving town.

Jenkins: About what population?

Ellis: Not many, but they had a good trade territory.

Jenkins: How did it compare in size to Mesquite at that time?

Ellis: It never was as big as Mesquite.

Jenkins: But it had a good trade area.

Ellis: It was a thriving town.

Jenkins: And when did the businesses start fading out, the town?

Ellis: About the time that we made the transition from the cotton farmer; as life changed from the buggy and horse days, we used to say, to the motor, the automobile. That was when if you didn't keep abreast of the times you were sunk. You had to give up horsecollars and put in automobile tires. Make the change completely, altogether. You had to quit wagons and buggies. That was gone. Of course you didn't get any automobiles, but you got other things in their place.

Jenkins: But your store was the major store in town, was it? The biggest store in town?

Ellis: I wouldn't say that, no. It was one of the biggest.

Jenkins: But it did survive, and the others didn't.

Ellis: It did survive.

Jenkins: How do you account for that, for your store surviving

and the others not?

Ellis: It was hard to do. It was hard to survive. We had to make that change, do a different turnover. We put in electric lights before we got TP&L. We had one of the first Delco lighting systems that pulled a refrigerator.

Jenkins: Oh, I see. Well, were you, then, about the first thing in town that had electricity?

Ellis: We first had a carbide lighting system in the old store. When we built the new brick store we put in the light. They had a light system up to a revolving light for airplanes. You know, they didn't have radar or nothing like that. That is what guided the planes through the air at night. And that line was in 7/10 of a mile of our store. And we asked them to come on up and light up the little town. They said, "No, we will furnish you the electric lights if you will buy the line, and we will build it." Papa said, "Will you make it hot if I build it?" They said, "If you will build it according to our specifications, we will." And we did. We built the thing, and they made it hot.

Jenkins: When?

Ellis: Oh, that was about the time the depression started. I don't know, it might have been before that. I guess it

was. Oh, it was in the late 20's probably. I don't know when it was.

Jenkins: First you had carbide lights?

Ellis: Yes. Then we had the Delco light with our own generator. Then we got TP&L. We got that built; we built it before Roosevelt went in, I know that. I think it was Hoover who was president. It was about the time the depression started. Because in Roosevelt's administration he formed that Rural Electrification, you know. And then we agreed to sell it to Texas Power and Light for what it cost us. And it cost us \$350. And we just got \$350.

Jenkins: By the time of the depression, had a lot of the stores in New Hope gone broke?

Ellis: I wouldn't know. I don't say 'go broke', no. They just faded out.

Jenkins: Faded out. You were, by then, the major store in New Hope.

Ellis: We were at one time the only store there. I believe there is only one store. Well, there is a little filling station that has got some merchandise in it right now. That is about the only thing. It is still the only store, I would say, there.

Jenkins: Yes, but by the time of the depression were you about the only store there then?

Ellis: Oh, no. There were several stores.

Jenkins: Tell us some of the things that you recall most about the depression and what it was doing to the area around there and what it was doing to your business.

Ellis: Well, it was kind of hard, but we fought it. We made a little money during the depression. We made money. My father and five other men in Dallas were on the planning board of the WPA. They had five million to spend. A lot of people thought he was on a salary, but he didn't get a nickel out of it. It was a free gratis. It was the Straus brothers, one of them at Duncanville and one was at De Soto. There were, I think, five men on that. I have forgotten their names. It is in my scrapbook at Eastfield College in Mesquite.

Jenkins: Yes, and we want to put on record here that some of your clippings and scrapbooks are at Eastfield College, and that they also have interviewed you. Professor Suzanne Starling of Eastfield College interviewed you, and those records are there in case anyone wants to follow up on it. Did you do a lot of credit business?

Ellis: Oh, all of our business was credit.

Jenkins: Tell us something about the credit business,

Ellis: One time we had an old negro that had a big family. And he worked for a fellow, and that year they made a complete

crop failure. And Papa had run the negro for the owner of the farm. He had a failure and he came up there and told my father that he couldn't pay him. Papa said, "That's all right. I will run you next year." But this negro had gone to Mesquite, and he had a big family, and he had gone to picking cotton for some people. You can make a lot of money picking cotton, you know. But he couldn't pay any debts. And he spent a lot for doing that season. And he came to New Hope from Mesquite, and he had his wagon load of merchandise. Papa asked him why didn't he buy it from him. He had sold him all through the year. He said, "Law, Mr. Ellis, I didn't know you sold for cash." Oh, it was a hard game. You made a nice profit, and if you collected, well, you made good money. But, oh, the gamble was there. The gamble was there. Boll weavils could eat up the cotton. Cotton was your money crop, and it was a treacherous crop. Drought could kill it. Just anything.

Jenkins: Drought could kill it, too much water could kill it.

Ellis: Yes, too much water could kill it. Too much rain would bring the boll weavils. Lord, we fought that credit business. It was all practically credit business. Like I told you, I guess, before we started that, during the

biggest years we had, we wouldn't take in a nickel during June and July, cash money.

Jenkins: Do you have any recollection of what your sales volume was during those years?

Ellis: Oh, no. It was big, though. We had a wonderful stock of drygoods and shoes, work clothes, and even had some Hart, Shafner and Marx.

Jenkins: Is that right? You were the general store.

Ellis: It was a general store.

Jenkins: You handled everything.

Ellis: Almost. It was like from the cradle to the grave.

Jenkins: But you don't have any recollection of what kind of sales volume you had?

Ellis: No, I don't. In those big days I don't know.

Jenkins: Do you remember what a typical sales day was? How much you might take in?

Ellis: Oh, on paydays?

Jenkins: Well, just on, say, a typical Saturday. Saturday was your big day, I suppose.

Ellis: Yes, but there is no telling how much. I can't remember, I was small. I know my father bought John and myself that peanut roaster we used to operate on Saturday. We would crank it and it burned some kind of juice under there. We used it a couple of Saturdays, and then we hired

a negro to run it. He had a little stick to sample them to see if they were parched, and by the time he would get them all parched he would eat them all up sampling.

Jenkins: Is that right?

Ellis: We had to discontinue that. We had one man that didn't do nothing but shave ice to make glass-ade. You put a bunch of ice in it and filled it full of syrup, strawberry syrup.

Jenkins: What we call snowcones.

Ellis: Snowcones, that is what it was.

Jenkins: But you called it glass-ade. And that is what we call snowcones.

Ellis: They are about the same thing. We put it in a glass, you know.

Jenkins: Where did you get the ice?

Ellis: We had to haul it from Dallas.

Jenkins: Dallas, and they made ice in Dallas.

Ellis: Oh, yes.

Jenkins: In blocks. Do you remember where you got it in Dallas?

Ellis: No, not in those days. Later we bought a lot of ice out there on East Grand. We used to buy it on Fitzhugh. Do you remember the Fitzhugh Ice Place?

Jenkins: Yes, I do.

Ellis: That was on old one. And then there used to be one down on Pacific, down on the tracks. Southland Ice Company, I believe. That was back in the old, old days.

Jenkins: So New Hope was kind of dying out, then, during the depression, I suppose.

Ellis: Yes, it began to kind of dry up.

Jenkins: You worked in this store all of your life.

Ellis: Yes.

Jenkins: When did you buy it? When did you become the owner?

Ellis: When my father passed away, I just continued running the store a few more years.

Jenkins: When did he die?

Ellis: I think in '42.

Jenkins: Oh, I see.

Ellis: I was a grown young man when he died. He died in '42, and I married in '38, I believe it was. I stayed single and helped him out.

Jenkins: I see. So you took over the store, then, in '42.

Ellis: I sold it to D, M. Lander, who operates it today.

Jenkins: How long after your father died?

Ellis: Well, about four years later.

Jenkins: I see. So you sold out in '46.

Ellis: Yes, I think that was it.

Jenkins: I think that is what you told me earlier. The depression, you said, pretty well . . .

Ellis: We had already changed over and kind of got ourselves accustomed to the new business. The first thing, I said, "Papa, we will lose a lot of business to town." You know the automobiles had come in. Back in the buggy and horse days they traded there, you know. They had to, practically. And he says, "It will make us. We will draw more from town than we will lose to town." I said, "How is that?" "Well, we are going to put in country butter, eggs. We are going to put in a market." We never had had a market. We had a market, but back in the old big days we didn't have it. You always sold salt meat and jowls. You remember that. There wasn't any refrigerator for them. But we had already said we were going to advertise home killed meats and stuff like that and bring them out. And we made country sausage. I made country sausage that was better than you can buy today.

Jenkins: You made it right there in the store?

Ellis: Right there. We had a recipe that Harry Williams gave us, Dr. Samuels' brother-in-law, and we used that. It built up a trade that wouldn't stop, and it put lots of work on us. We killed the old hogs and put the whole hog

in the sausage.

Jenkins: You did the killing yourself?

Ellis: We had them killed, I didn't kill them myself.

Jenkins: But you made the sausage. Was your dad still farming on the side?

Ellis: Oh, no, not while he ran the store. He just worked for Mr. Lyons, who owned the farm. And when he married he quit farming. He was in the store. That was all he had ever done, as far as I know. That is all that I knew.

Jenkins: And that is about all you ever did, was in the store.

Ellis: Yes. Oh, after I sold the store, I did a little traveling salesman, and I got in a little golfing business.

Jenkins: Well, you ran the store by yourself, then.

Ellis: Yes. I had help.

Jenkins: About how much? How many people did you . . .

Ellis: About one is all. Me and then somebody else.

Jenkins: Back in the old days when things were really humming, how many people?

Ellis: I don't know. He had a pharmacy and a drug at one time. And I don't know, two or three in the grocery. He hated groceries. He would get mad if you said, "Mr. Ellis, are you in the grocery business?" "No, I am in the mercantile business."

- Jenkins: But he did carry groceries?
- Ellis: Oh, yes. He said, "That is what I hold them with, and beat them to death with the drygoods."
- Jenkins: Did you and your dad ever get involved in any other businesses except the one in New Hope?
- Ellis: Well, my father owned a sugar plantation in Louisiana. And during the hard times in '20 he sold it to pay Sanger Brothers. That is one of the reasons that we didn't go broke. Well, we went broke, but we stayed in business.
- Jenkins: You mentioned something about buying out a store in Mesquite.
- Ellis: I think it was the 5¢ and 10¢ store, Bear closed up and we bought the fixtures and the stock and moved it to New Hope.
- Jenkins: So you worked in that store all of your life, and became the sole owner in 1942 when your dad died.
- Ellis: Yes.
- Jenkins: And then you sold out in 1946. Tell us about the sale. How did Lander know about the store?
- Ellis: His father was one of our old customers. They were old customers of ours. This boy's daddy traded with us for, oh, no telling how many years. We knew him when he was a young fellow before he married.

Jenkins: They lived out there?

Ellis: Oh, yes. He was raised out there, practically.

Jenkins: What is his full name?

Ellis: Martin Lander, Jr.

Jenkins: Had he worked in the store?

Ellis: No.

Jenkins: Had he worked in any store, as far as you know?

Ellis: I don't think so. When he came back from the Army he got a job, I think, selling either drygoods or hardware as a travelling salesman. And I was worn out after the war. You see, I had all of the stamps to take care of.

Jenkins: Stamps?

Ellis: Food stamps. During the war I had food stamps, gasoline stamps, shoe stamps, coffee stamps. You had to sign a ticket to buy a pair of pliers; that you were going to use them on the farm. You didn't know that, did you?

Jenkins: No, I didn't.

Ellis: Sugar, coffee, tea. All those stamps, I had them all.

Jenkins: What were some of the other things that you had to sign that you were going to use on the farm?

Ellis: I guess right now that is all that I can recall.

Jenkins: Just about any kind of tools, then, I suppose?

Ellis: Just a pair of pliers. It was an old law, you know. It

was against the law to carry a pair of pliers back in the old days, Cutting fences, you know. But they never did change it when automobiles came in. But during the war I don't know why they wanted to do the signing that you were going to use it on the farm.

Jenkins: You told us the problems of the depression, What are some of the other problems of getting through the war? Did you have much trouble getting merchandise during the war?

Ellis: During WW II, yes, it was quite a job, quite a job, And, see, at that time Papa died during the war, and it drove me crazy trying to keep merchandise, I had an awful time,

Jenkins: What were some of the things that were hard to get?

Ellis: Well, there were a number of things that were hard to get, A lot of groceries were hard to get, and a lot of tin hardware such as tubs and buckets, that kind of stuff that you sold; staple stuff, a lot of it you sold, you know, A lot of it.

Jenkins: Did you ever have a Post Office in the store?

Ellis: Oh, yes. Papa was Post Master once,

Jenkins: How many years was it in the store?

Ellis: It was in the store, as I remember as a little kid, it was in there quite a while, It was in there, I guess,

when I was born. In the scrapbook, I believe, is the letter that appointed him Post Master by John Wannamaker, the Post Master General at that time. That is quite an old thing in my scrapbook.

Jenkins: Well, did they build a Post Office in New Hope?

Ellis: No, no. They did away with it when rural delivery came in. You see, there wasn't any rural delivery. The mail was brought out by one man to all of the little towns, you know. There was no delivery to each mail box. You had to come to the store to get your mail. We had Captain H. O. Samuels, that is Dr. W. W. Samuels' father, who was one of our best customers. He told my father, he said, "Now, when that dog comes up there, take my mail, tie a string around it, and stick it in his mouth. It is all right. He will bring it home." And he came up there every day for the mail, that dog did. That is a fact.

Jenkins: Well, do you remember about when they closed the Post Office?

Ellis: Oh, no. It was a long time. I was just a little, bitty kid when they closed it.

Jenkins: But it was . . .

Ellis: In the store,

Jenkins: Until they closed it, then.

Ellis: Yes.

Jenkins: I see. So all of those years the Post Office was right there in the store.

Ellis: In our store. He was the Post Master.

Jenkins: Did New Hope have a political organization? Mayor?

Ellis: Oh, no.

Jenkins: It didn't have a mayor or anything?

Ellis: No. It wasn't a township at all. Just a little village called New Hope.

Jenkins: I see. Just a community, then.

Ellis: A community. We never had a mayor. That was formed when they called it Sunnyvale.

Jenkins: Oh, I see. Okay.

Ellis: It never was incorporated.

Jenkins: So Martin Lander, Jr. bought it out in '46?

Ellis: Yes.

Jenkins: Do you care to tell us what he paid for it?

Ellis: I practically gave it to him. I wanted to get out of it. I had worked hard enough.

Jenkins: So he took over in '46. About what kind of condition, what kind of things were you selling when you sold out?

Ellis: Oh, general store; hardware, some drug sundries, shoes, nails, bolts. He still sells it. Now he has got televisions, radios. He had to quit selling shotguns and rifles. They would steal them as fast as you put them in.

We finally had to quit selling automobile tires while we had the store. They would know exactly the day we got them in, and somebody would steal them. They would steal them that night,

Jenkins: After you sold the store what did you do? You went into selling, did you?

Ellis: Yes, after I laid around about a year.

Jenkins: What did you go into, then?

Ellis: I never did go into anything. I sold some stuff as a salesman. I worked for Terrell Milling Company as a feed salesman for a while. He was a friend of mine, and his salesman quit. He said, "Can you help me a couple of weeks?" And I said, "Yes, Charlie." And I went to work for him, and I finally had to tell him I had to quit because he didn't pay me anything.

Jenkins: How long did you work for him?

Ellis: Oh, I don't know. About a year.

Jenkins: What kind of feed?

Ellis: Oh, just Red Diamond feed. Old man Howell Horton at Greenville practically owned it. He started the Red Diamond Feed, Horse and cow feed,

Jenkins: Chickens and pigs and the whole thing?

Ellis: Yes, grain and corn. Just any kind of feed.

Jenkins: Well, you were saying that you retired in '62. You

must have taken up something else.

Ellis: Well, I went mostly into the golf business. I got a job in a golf shop.

Jenkins: Oh, where?

Ellis: First was the Dallas Athletic Club.

Jenkins: In the pro shop?

Ellis: Yes. And then I went to work for Harry Todd at the River Lake Country Club.

Jenkins: Doing what?

Ellis: In the pro shop. Selling. And I retired from there after Harry died. Joe Bisback was a pro, and he asked me would I stay. And I told him I would until I retired, and it was getting about that time. And I retired in '62. And I haven't done anything since.

Jenkins: Where did you live before you came here to Crestview?

Ellis: Oh, well, you mean when I left New Hope?

Jenkins: Yes.

Ellis: I moved to Lake Tawakoni. When my wife died I stayed at New Hope just sitting around the house for about a year and a half. And I couldn't take it any longer. I had to get away. I moved down to Lake Tawakoni, just enjoying it down there. I liked the little town of Wills Point. It is one of the nicest little towns I was ever in.

Jenkins: Did you live in Wills Point?

Ellis: Oh, no, but I did my business there. My mail came there, and I did a lot of eating over there. I did my banking business there. My Post Office was the main thing. I just made a lot of friends in Wills Point. I wish I was still down there. I have got more friends there. My friends in New Hope are all dead nearly, most of them.

Jenkins: Well, when you lived down at Lake Tawakoni did you do lots of fishing?

Ellis: I did a lot of fishing, yes.

Jenkins: Did you garden?

Ellis: Oh, no. I didn't work at all.

Jenkins: You didn't want to work.

Ellis: No work.

Jenkins: And you moved from Tawakoni to here?

Ellis: No, I had a car wreck and broke this leg, and I moved to the hospital. And I didn't have anybody but myself to wait on me, so I had to go to a nursing home. I came home to Wills Point to the lake for one year. A lady waited on me a year, but she just had to quit. And I never could get nobody else. Once in a while she would say, "Let's go back, and I will take care of you for a while." And we did. I went down there the other day, but I can't stay down there. I can't do anything. I

can't make up my bed. I am helpless, except I can walk with a walker. Up here I can just scoot around in my electric wheelchair.

Jenkins: Let's go back to the depression a little bit. Now you were in New Hope all during the depression.

Ellis: Oh, yes.

Jenkins: The store survived.

Ellis: Yes, it survived.

Jenkins: Your own family did all right, I suppose.

Ellis: We did all right. We made a little money during the depression.

Jenkins: What did you see going on around you, though? Was unemployment very high?

Ellis: I have seen farmers lose their farms. It was terrible. I built my home, a nice little home. It was just a cheap little thing. It had a hardwood floor completely even into the kitchen and the closets and all that. The carpenter took the whole job, turnkey job, for \$400 and paid himself 75¢ a day to build that house. The plumbing was put in and the kitchen sink, the water heater, and the plumbing for the stove and everything that run back to the bathroom, all of the bathroom fixtures put in, the septic tank, the septic tank line, and I had an electric water pump over my well, and he run the line

and he done it for \$180, the whole business.

Jenkins: How much did that whole house cost you?

Ellis: It cost \$2,500. That was a lot of money in those days. It was a nicely built home. It is still standing. It is a nice little house.

Jenkins: What year was that built?

Ellis: Well, let's see. 1938. I had it built when I moved in it. I got married that night.

Jenkins: Now this was in about '38.

Ellis: Well, it was '37 or '38. You see, I was on the, I sat on the Federal Jury the year after the Centennial. Nearly all of the civil cases had something to do with the Centennial. Judge Atwell was judge. And then after we got through with the civil cases we went into the criminal end of it. And Judge Davidson was judge in the criminal cases. And we tried those. It didn't take long, but one of the main cases that we tried was a narcotic case, the biggest one that has ever been tried, I guess, in Dallas. 13 would be tried at one time. It was the Ginsberg case, and Ginsberg got 50 years in the pen for that. That was part of it. Some of them only got 3 years. There were 13 of them tried at one time. That Federal Jury is something. Whenever they try a civil case it took one day. Now a criminal case you find them guilty or innocent.

And the way the judge reads that charge, you know what you are going to do. Then he sets their penalty. You don't have nothing to do with that. You knew that, didn't you? The judge sets the penalty. I don't know whether they have changed that or not, that law.

Jenkins: When you were in the business out there, what kind of advertising did you do?

Ellis: Oh, the only thing we did was a little weekly paper at Mesquite. We ran an ad in that as long as it was the Mesquiter, the Texas Mesquiter, as long as we were in business. We did get a lot of publicity in the Dallas News. In 1939 we had our 50th anniversary, and we fed 2,500 people a barbecue. It was quite a show.

Jenkins: Who did you have there? Who was at the barbecue?

Ellis: Everybody. We advertised a free barbecue, and they told me in Mesquite, "Your daddy has stuck his neck out. He can't do it." He did do it. He had barbecue to just to pass and give away. There were, I think, 2,000 signed the guest register. They came in and signed the guest register at the store. That is how we knew. And we knew how many buns we had. We had to go scout around and get all of the bread we could find around the country. We ran out of buns, but we didn't run out of meat.

Jenkins: Advertising in the Mesquiter was about all of the advertising you did?

Ellis: Yes. The Mesquiter was just a little weekly. It put out an edition that had 26 pages to it. I have still got it somewhere. I think Eastfield got it. I am not sure about that.

Jenkins: Did you ever print up these little fliers and go put them in people's doors, or stuff like that?

Ellis: Yes, and at one time we had a peddling wagon. It left out on Monday morning and got back in the latter part of that week. We had it full of some drygoods, some piece-goods. It had some staple groceries, a little coffee and sugar. And it came back with money and chickens and eggs. It was an old time peddling wagon.

Jenkins: Who ran this, your dad?

Ellis: Papa had it, and he ran it. A man named Sidney Lux, Dad hired to do it. We owned a team and a little wagon, just a regular peddling wagon. Papa would fill it up, and this man would go out and peddle it.

Jenkins: How far from New Hope?

Ellis: All the way to Rockwall County. Eastern part of Dallas and Rockwall County.

Jenkins: What kinds of stuff would he take?

Ellis: Oh, just a little drygoods and thread and buttons, etc., and a few groceries. And I think he had, maybe, some

trace chains, a little harness, you know. Stuff a farmer might need, you know.

Jenkins: Did you ever go on that wagon?

Ellis: No, I was too little. That was one of the old, old days.

Jenkins: How would this fellow spend the night?

Ellis: Oh, these peddlers, people would be glad to give them some place to stay all night.

Jenkins: In people's homes?

Ellis: Yes. Some family that he would sell.

Jenkins: Do you know about when this was?

Ellis: Oh, I just can't remember. Oh, Lord, it was before I went to school in Mesquite. This was in the early 1900's. I was just a little, bitty kid.

Jenkins: When and why did he quit sending the wagon out?

Ellis: About the age when I could remember, in the late 1800's and in the early 1900's he quit it.

Jenkins: Do you know why he quit it?

Ellis: It got to where it wasn't successful, I guess, was one reason. I guess it was, but the roads weren't good, you know. It started to rain, and you could never get home.

Jenkins: You were telling me a story one time about a trip back from Dallas that you had some . . .

Ellis: I used to go to Dallas in a buggy and tie my three mules

behind me and bring them buggies in.

Jenkins: You sold buggies out there.

Ellis: Yes.

Jenkins: Pulled all of those buggies home.

Ellis: And that was one of Papa's favorite things to do. He would go to the fair. They didn't have an automobile building, they had a buggy building. And he bought a lot of buggies from the Banner Buggy Company. They would put his name on the buggy. Starting of the Fair, "Sold to Frank Ellis at New Hope." And he got a little advertising out of that.

Jenkins: Do you know how much a buggy was selling for then?

Ellis: Oh, \$35 or \$40. If it was a good rubber tire, a little more. A lot of them were just plain steel tires, you know.

Jenkins: Where was the fair being held then?

Ellis: Where it is now.

Jenkins: Same place.

Ellis: Yes.

Jenkins: You went to the fair, I guess, a lot then?

Ellis: Yes.

Jenkins: What are some of your recollections?

Ellis: "Stay in the wagon yard."

Jenkins: Have you been to the fair lately?

Ellis: I haven't been lately, no. My father never missed a year. I don't think he ever missed a year when he died. I haven't been going because I can't go with this.

Jenkins: What was the fair like then? What were some of the exhibits?

Ellis: Oh, at one time they had that grandstand with horse racing going on. The old fair grounds was about just this side of the midway, you see. The tracks ran around by where those three exposition buildings were. Oh, the fair grounds have changed a lot. Where the roller coaster is, there used to be houses. And the shoot-the-shoot, where you go down in a boat and hit the water. They had an agricultural building that was a whole lot better than it is today. Those farmers, every county was represented, with a pretty display of what they made; sorghum and maize and cotton. They would have some of the most beautiful bolts of cotton, you know. I wish they could do that today.

Jenkins: Well, was Mesquite having a fair back then?

Ellis: Oh, no, not then. But Mesquite had started having a fair later on. They had a nice little fair, for a country town.

Jenkins: New Hope never did have a fair, I don't suppose?

Ellis: They had a gala day.

Jenkins: What about that?

Ellis: Oh, that was it.

Jenkins: Every year?

Ellis: They had a prize for the prettiest baby, and bottle races and all that. Those old-time things, you know. We re-enacted that old gala day. We gave a prize to the man that came the farthest. And we had a fellow there that came from Oklahoma, that used to work for Papa in the store. He came to the barbecue. And we had bottle races and the fattest man, and all that stuff during this barbecue. There was quite a little to-do. Just the re-enactment of a gala day is what we tried to put on.

Jenkins: Well now, did your store put this on?

Ellis: Oh, yes. Wasn't but one store there then.

Jenkins: So this is something that you did every year?

Ellis: No, no. Oh, back in the old days they had a gala day about once a month.

Jenkins: Oh, I see. It was kind of a trade day?

Ellis: Yes, something like that.

Jenkins: So that was kind of like trade day.

Ellis: Yes.

Jenkins: And did it center around your store?

Ellis: Oh, no. That was when all of the stores were there. I have a picture of it. I have a picture of one gala day there. It is out at Eastfield College.

Jenkins: Who sponsored the gala day?

Ellis: The merchants all went in together.

Jenkins: And it was kind of what we call a "trade day".

Ellis: To bring the people in, you know, into town. There weren't any paved roads in those days. A pike road is just a dirt road. And so many came one day, and it rained while they were there, and when they left they claimed the street was two feet lower than it was. They took that much dirt off with them.

Jenkins: Well, you said that New Hope wasn't ever incorporated, So I don't suppose you had any chance to get involved in politics, did you?

Ellis: They didn't have any police protection or anything like that, you know, and no judges and no officers. It wasn't incorporated.

Jenkins: So you never got involved in politics.

Ellis: Oh, no. Did you know that my father sat on the grand jury more than any one man in Dallas County?

Jenkins: Is that right?

Ellis: He sat on it four times in three years.

Jenkins: That is strange.

Ellis: That is a record. They liked him on the grand jury.

Jenkins: Did you ever get involved in any clubs?

Ellis: Oh, nothing but a Mason.

Jenkins: You are a Mason. All right. Did you have a Chamber of Commerce there in New Hope?

Ellis: Oh, no.

Jenkins: So there just wasn't much to join there, was there?

Ellis: No.

Jenkins: Tell us some of the stories that you remember.

Ellis: One Monday morning it was kind of rainy. It had come a hard rain over Sunday, I guess it was. The farmers all went to the store like they did when they didn't have anywhere else to go. Papa went back in the hardware department and got him a shovel and a pick and something else and started out the front door. And they said, "Mr. Ellis, where are you going?" "I am going up to the cemetery and help them dig that grave." "Grave? Who died?" "John Doe." "I didn't know that John was sick." "Well," Papa said, "he said he would be in Saturday and pay me if he lived. I know he is dead."

Jenkins: You apparently did take in all kinds of stuff in payment besides money.

Ellis: Oh, yes. We took in chickens, butter, eggs and some hay.

Jenkins: What are your recollections of having to go and borrow money to run the business over the years?

Ellis: One time when we lost so much money on cotton the bank just told us to write a check. We wrote checks and made a note of it after we got through that day.

Jenkins: You mean you wrote the checks, but you didn't have any money.

Ellis: Didn't have the money. But then we had the finances at the bank.

Jenkins: They took care of it.

Ellis: They took care of it. Instead of going down and borrowing it, they didn't know how much we were going to have to buy cotton with. You see, your telephone service wasn't too good. You couldn't go to Mesquite in 15 minutes like you can now, you know.

Jenkins: The store bought cotton?

Ellis: Oh, yes. We bought practically all of the cotton that was sold that was raised on their farms, we bought.

Jenkins: You bought it before it was ginned or what?

Ellis: No, no, after it was ginned. We would dump it out there on the road and get so many bales. We would sell it and then haul it down to Mesquite and put it in the Mesquite

cotton yard.

Jenkins: So you were the cotton buyer.

Ellis: Yes.

Jenkins: I didn't realize that.

Ellis: Papa was, I wasn't. He was a pretty good grader. He could tell you what staple it was.

Jenkins: How many bales might you have in a year?

Ellis: Oh, we would have 40 or 50 laying out there in the road. If we had had a fire it would have burned up every one of them.

Jenkins: And then you shipped them to Mesquite.

Ellis: Yes, hauled them down to Mesquite in the wagon after we got so many and sell them, you know.

Jenkins: Then Mesquite shipped them to Dallas, I suppose.

Ellis: I don't know where that salesman sold them to. A salesman in Mesquite would buy them.

Jenkins: Well, were there any other farm products around there that you got involved in in the store?

Ellis: No. Cotton was the main crop. That was it. They hardly ever made enough corn, except for their own use to feed the stock and the hogs and stuff like that. They didn't raise it for money crops.

Jenkins: Do you remember when the first car came to New Hope?

Ellis: I can remember when I went over to the highway from

Mesquite to Dallas to watch old man E. H. R. Green come from Terrell in that Rambler. You know, his mother was that Hettie Green.

Jenkins: Oh, yes.

Ellis: Hettie Green, the biggest financial woman wizard that ever lived. She had this son, old reprobate E. H. R. Green. He bought that Midland Railroad, from Terrell down that way. He let everybody know when he was going to Dallas that day, and we all got out. He had everybody out there to watch him. One of them old Ramblers, you know. It didn't have a steering wheel. It had a thing like this.

Jenkins: Your earliest recollections of New Hope, were there cars there in New Hope?

Ellis: Yes, there was in 1912, I think, the first one we ever had. That is when I graduated. We had a Hupmobile.

Jenkins: But your recollection as a child, were there very many cars?

Ellis: Oh, no. There weren't many cars when I came back from the war. The Ford had taken over, you know. You would hardly ever see anything but a Model T, you know. Everybody had a Model T.

Jenkins: When did the store buy it's first car and start using it?

Ellis: Back in about 1920 we had an Overland truck.

Jenkins: Did you do deliveries?

Ellis: Yes, we did some deliveries. They didn't call them pickups, they called them little trucks. They had a top that went over and then down like this. No cab, it was all one body. It had the open seats, you know. It wasn't built like a pickup is today.

Jenkins: You made home deliveries of things?

Ellis: We hauled a lot of our stuff out of Dallas with it, We got to where we would haul a lot of stuff out of Dallas.

Jenkins: Could people call the store and have you deliver things to them?

Ellis: Yes.

Jenkins: In New Hope,

Ellis: It came to that.

Jenkins: Did you do some of that yourself?

Ellis: Yes.

Jenkins: Have you been to the store lately?

Ellis: Not since I had the wreck, I don't believe. It has been about 5 years, I used to go every week.

Jenkins: You haven't seen what has happened to New Hope then in the last 5 years?

Ellis: Oh, yes, I saw it not long ago. The store is still there, The only thing is they have taken nearly all of the street

in front of it. You can't park a car in front of it. The store looks like it always has, but I haven't been in it. But there are houses built up to the road. Now that was my farm on the other side, that goes toward Mesquite. It went up Belt Line all the way down to Town East Blvd.

Jenkins: I am going to interview Landers later, but I would like your opinion. With supermarkets, drive-ins and all of those things, there he sits with that general store.

Ellis: It is still there. It is still modern. He ought to be doing a wonderful business.

Jenkins: That is what I wanted to ask you. How do you think he manages to do that?

Ellis: Compete with the others?

Jenkins: Yes.

Ellis: It is something like when Wyatt had these food stores and sold them to Kroger. He called it the Hometown Grocery. It is still a hometown store. It has that country feeling. You can mosey around it and look and know there isn't anybody following you with eyes. They trust you. It is still that kind of a store, I believe.

Jenkins: Does he still do a big credit business?

Ellis: I don't know if he does or not. I wouldn't say. Not like we used to do. Because there is no farming anymore

there. Everybody works for a salary, and they can pay every month. He may charge some stuff, yes. But I mean from fall-to-fall charges, no. I would like to go back and talk to him. I could call him up, but I am afraid he is busy. I wouldn't want to bother him.

Jenkins: Let's summarize here a little bit before I ask you this last question. You were born in 1897. You worked in that store in New Hope . . .

Ellis: After I got big enough to work in a store.

Jenkins: But that is the job that you held most of all of your life. You dad was with you until 1942 in the store. He died then. You took over the store, and you sold it in 1946.

Ellis: Yes.

Jenkins: You were born before the turn of the century, and you have seen an awful lot of changes. How do you compare your life as a youngster with the way you see things today?

Ellis: Well, somebody once asked me that question. I said, "Well, those good old days, if you call taking a bath in a number 3 washtub the good old days." But after all, we have seen the horse and mule days, the buggy days, the automobile days, the man walking on the moon. But back

in the horse and buggy days you didn't know any better. There is where it comes in. We had a lot of fun going to a country party. You didn't know what a movie was, so you were no worse off. You just didn't know it. I think with what they are learning and what we knew in those days and what we do today, we were much better off than the people are today. I think the kids had more fun then than they do now, and they were whipped more. They were switched more in those days, which made them better, I think. The kids were more honest. They were taught that, better than they teach it today. Don't you think so? You can't answer it, I know.

Jenkins: I wasn't there. I wasn't there at the turn of the century like you were. But today you live comfortably.

Ellis: I live comfortably. I have got everything I want here. You see a nice room. I don't have to cook. I don't have to make up my bed. I am not in a nursing home. They call it a hotel, Crestview Hotel. I am enjoying it. I get in my wheelchair and drive anywhere. It is electric. I put it on charge once a week right there behind you. All I have to do is just plug it in and turn it on. When I wake up in the morning, it is charged. So I have got a good life now. And you don't

have to go running to the barn. You go to the room. It is like the old man said, that he likes the country better. They go outside to cook the cabbage and go inside to go to the restroom. That is the difference in the way it has changed. Oh, it is really better now, but we had lots of fun in those days. Then you could do it on 50¢. If you had the 50¢.

Jenkins: Is there anything else that you would like to add before we close?

Ellis: I don't know of anything.

Jenkins: Okay, thank you very much for an interesting interview. We will mention once more, to be sure that anyone who reads this will know, that your papers are in the Eastfield College Library, in the Archives, and that they also did an interview with you. So anyone who wants to follow up on this will have additional information to study. And, of course, I will give you a copy, and I think the folks at Eastfield said that they would like to have a copy to put with your papers if that is all right with you. Anything else?

Ellis: No.

Jenkins: Thank you very much.